



CITY COUNCIL Colleague's Memo

Sponsor(s): Council Member Burt, Mayor Kou, and Vice Mayor Stone

Subject: Authority to Form Friendship Cities

Meeting Date: June 19, 2023

Report #: 2306-1672

TITLE

Colleagues Memo: Approval of a "Friendship City" Program

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION:

Palo Alto has long benefited from its Sister City and Sibling City relationships through sustainability, economic development, innovation practices, student exchanges, academia, and cultural relationships. International engagement with Palo Alto is frequent at multiple levels including government, business, community, and education. When a local government has sought to formalize an interchange, the approach has been through a formal Sister City agreement, and more recently a domestic Sibling City agreement.

City Staff and Council Members periodically receive invitations to develop relationships from cities. However, these relationships have not been pursued because Council action, staff and Neighbors Abroad support and resources would be required.

In addition to sister-city relationships, some U.S. cities have developed a "Friendship City" program including Menlo Park, Redwood City, Cupertino, San Antonio TX, and Portsmouth NH. This is a more modest engagement between cities that does not require significant commitments by the city or local non-profit. This model is recognized also by Sister Cities International, the governing body of Palo Alto's Sister Cities:

The terms "sister city" and "friendship city" sometimes have different meanings. Generally speaking, friendship cities are less formal than sister cities. In some cities, "friendship city" is often used as a first stage in the relationship, and after it is strengthened, and the partners are sure they want a long-term relationship they will become "sister cities."

Palo Alto's international engagement is supported by Neighbors Abroad, Inc. Neighbors Abroad is a 501(c)(3) organization that, with annual funding from the City of Palo Alto together with donations from the community, supports international engagement. Their Board has endorsed the development of Friendship City agreements within the following parameters:

“To develop a revenue neutral relationship for a fixed term called a Friendship City, led by a community member who will take responsibility for the relationship and become a board member of Neighbors Abroad.”

After discussions with Neighbors Abroad, as well as reviewing Friendship City programs nationally, the following framework is proposed for a Friendship City agreement with Palo Alto:

- A local volunteer that would commit across the term of the Friendship City;
- A statement document that sets a description of the prospective Friendship City, expected activities with the Friendship City, and a rationale for formation which comports with Neighbors Abroad’s policy for Friendship Cities;
- Endorsement by the President of Neighbors Abroad;
- Acceptance by the City Council member serving as liaison to Neighbors Abroad; and
- Endorsement by the Mayor and Vice-Mayor, and Council approval of the Agreement after placement on the Consent Calendar.

Different from a Sister City relationship, a Friendship City Agreement would be limited to three years, subject to Council renewal. The Agreement allows for a test of time, and if the relationship waivers, the agreement would not be renewed. A draft agreement is attached.

RECOMMENDATION

The City Council is requested to extend the authority to enter into Friendship City relationships subject to the conditions in this Colleagues’ Memo. Upon execution of any Friendship City Agreement, the Agreement shall be provided to Neighbors Abroad to support implementation.

FISCAL/RESOURCE IMPACT

The fiscal and resource impact for this proposal can vary widely, and as such staff believes it should not be considered insignificant nor fully defined at this time. Anticipated activities or resources likely needed include the following:

- Staff resources to coordinate requests for new Friendship Cities. Staff resources to coordinate details for formal agreement signings and celebrations.
- Staff coordination and participation by applicable staff (City Manager’s Office, City Clerk’s Office, and various departments with topic expertise) in relationship building, as well as development and production of discussion topics before, during, and after delegation visits.
- Communications efforts to coordinate with Friendship Cities and Neighbors Abroad representatives to publicize events and other milestones.
- Staff resources to coordinate Councilmember-related efforts for the Friendship City, including developing any formal letters, commendations, or gifts needed related to the Friendship City and associated logistics.
- Providing financial and staff support for City financial resources provided to Neighbors Abroad for reception hosting for visiting delegations.

The actual amount of time needed for the items above varies. Without dedicated staffing and budget allocation for international relations work, these items are spread among existing staff. Depending on the amount of time needed for these activities, existing staff must redirect time away from other council priorities and assignments to accomplish these tasks. This includes the staff and City Council time that may be needed to develop this program.

As noted above, Friendship City relationships are a first stage in connecting two cities together. For the City of Palo Alto, most of the existing eight (8) Sister City and one (1) Sibling City relationships started off as something informal either between Palo Alto neighbors and colleagues in an international city, or as an early agreement to test a relationship before formalizing. Without clarity as to what Friendship Cities should expect from Palo Alto over time, and the anticipated guidance for expansion of Palo Alto's program, the City should logically expect situations where the Friendship Cities seek to become more formally connected to Palo Alto as additional Sister Cities with the associated resource expectations.

Should the Council wish to proceed with growth in international relations activities reflected in the establishment of this new program, staff recommends that the parameters guiding the City's involvement be set forth in writing through the Council's Procedures and Protocols Handbook. It would also be prudent to establish appropriate monitoring of international relations activities through a budget line item for this purpose.

It should further be noted that the City of Palo Alto receives many inquiries and requests to establish relationships with cities around the world. As such, while Palo Alto may intend only a modest time and other resource allocation to these relationships, these communities often place a high priority to the relationship, and this is reflected in the level of effort, attention, and expense invested into the relationship. This dynamic creates situations where reciprocation is expected and difficult to avoid.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Draft Agreement for the Establishment of a Friendship City